

Formative Evaluation of Selected Exhibits
for the Interpretive Center at the
African Burial Ground

conducted for
Amaze Design
and the National Park Service

Overview of Reactions to Prototypes

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Executive Summary

Goal and Method

The purpose of this study was to assess the reactions of potential visitors to several prototypes of exhibit concepts under development for the African Burial Ground interpretive center.

The prototypes of exhibits to be evaluated were installed in two museums: the Museum of the City of New York and the New York Hall of Science. In all, nine exhibits plus several text/graphics panels were presented to visitors who sought out the exhibits after seeing signs or receiving invitations in the course of their normal visit to the museum (the audience was not pre-selected or specially invited to the museums for this purpose). Visitors were encouraged to look around without input from the interviewers. After it was apparent that a visitor group was finished viewing the exhibits, the adult closest to the interviewer was approached and asked to be interviewed. The exhibits were available for viewing from December 27-29th of 2006.

In total, 209 visitors at the two museums were interviewed after viewing the exhibit prototypes. One-hundred and one adults were interviewed about the entire “cluster” of exhibits after they had finished looking at the exhibits. For each of four individual exhibit studies, a separate sample of 27 additional adults was interviewed about that specific exhibit. Over 95% of visitors who were asked agreed to be interviewed for this research.

Major Findings

The exhibit prototypes as a whole and individually were only *moderately appealing* to people. In part, this result parallels the findings of the front-end research that indicated moderate interest in the subject but that the idea of visiting an interpretive center at the African Burial Ground is not a compelling experience for people who are not of African descent. And in part, visitors’ interests may have been muted by the normal character of formative prototypes, if visitors had expectations of seeing completed exhibits. For example, the proposed highly interactive Burial Table concept was represented as a large photograph with a notebook to explain how it might *become* interactive. The idea of several historical characters was represented by a single individual. And the spatial experience of a contemplative ‘Core’ was represented by a good sketch, which made sense as a way of seeking feedback but relied on visitors’ imaginations of a three-dimensional experience.

Most visitors indicated relatively high *interest in visiting the interpretive center* once it opens. This may be related to the way in which people encountered the exhibits: any museum visitors were invited by a sign or printed invitation to see exhibits about the African Burial Ground, but of course, visitors who were more interested in the topic were the ones who chose to actually see the exhibits. The aggregate interest was, however, somewhat uneven among different segments of the audience. People of African descent are much more

interested in visiting than people who are not of African descent. Among people who are not of African descent, New Yorkers are more interested than non-New Yorkers (tourists and suburbanites) and women are more interested than men. These patterns reflect the public's pre-existing interests (similar to patterns encountered in other visitor studies) rather than a unique response to these exhibits.

Gender also plays a role in what is likely to interest visitors to the interpretive center at the African Burial Ground. People (of both genders) are more interested in the stories of women and children in slavery than men in slavery. Men have a stronger interest than women in learning about the science behind what has been learned about the people interred at the burial ground.

Contrary to some initial concerns, ***viewing images of human remains*** will probably not be an obstacle for visitors to the interpretive center. The prototypes included models or images of human remains in three ways: the Remains Wall had hundreds of images of remains in situ, the Burial table had a life-sized image of burial #340, and two models of human pelvises that people could pick up and examine. Few people had reservations about the appropriateness of these representations and the Remains Wall was by far the highlight for most people who were interviewed. Another finding was that people did not engage the Remains Wall from a distance, but instead almost every visitor was observed looking at the wall from a distance of less than three feet.

Emotional responses to the exhibits will be strong in some people and have less impact on the science-oriented visitors. People of various races and ethnic groups will have feelings and thoughts about racism and the horrors of slavery. People of African descent are likely to combine these less pleasant feelings with positive feelings of pride and inspiration. It will be a challenge to create exhibits and programs that make room for all visitors to encounter these conflicting emotions.

The four studies of individual exhibits

Historical Character: Although the Historical Character exhibit (representing Peter Williams Sr.) was only moderately interesting to most people, people wanted more historical characters represented in this way. The less than enthusiastic interest may be related in part to the large amount of text presented on the five panels of this exhibit. Visitors seem to be more interested in seeing more characters but having less text to read per character. After viewing the exhibit, most visitors did not realize that Peter Williams Sr. was not buried in the African Burial Ground, but even fewer people thought this was a problem.

Burial Table: Most people who viewed this prototype gained some idea about its purpose: some thought it demonstrated how science tells us about the lives of these individuals, while others thought the prototype was about the burial customs or conveying the reality of the burial ground. The prototype of the Burial Table was limited in how well it could represent the depth and breadth of interactivity that is planned for the finished exhibit and this may have been a factor in why it elicited only moderate enthusiasm. A few people may be confused by the focus on burial #340, thinking that it is typical of the remains exhumed.

The Core: The prototype of the Core space was represented by a good sketch, a modest-size color drawing of the concept and a text description. Two ancillary images (a woman washing clothes and a young man carrying an American flag) accompanied the Core image. Even though this will be a room-sized, three-dimensional exhibit and yet was represented by a small two-dimensional image, people expressed moderate to high interest in this concept. In spite of this interest, most people did not expect to spend much time here, mostly thinking they would stop briefly. They didn't recognize this as a space for contemplation and perhaps there should be some explicit cues or support for contemplation in the actual space. The design challenge for this exhibit seems to be to give people reasons to stop and contemplate this scene.

Text & Graphics Styles: People were divided in their preferences for *writing styles*, yet had relatively strong preferences for styles of graphics and illustration. Although people want the writing style to be "inclusive," people differed on whether or not the first-person, African American writing perspective accomplishes this. In terms of *color*, most people preferred the black graphic background with a serrated edge of a different color and thought it was more striking and appropriate to African/African American style or appropriately symbolic of death. Two *styles of illustration* were strongly preferred over others. Those that people associated with African/African American patterns or style were preferred over those that were deemed more modern.

New York Hall of Science



Museum of the City of New York



Individual studies of exhibit prototypes

See the appendix for images and descriptions of all exhibit prototypes.

Historical Character



Burial Table



The Core



Text & Graphics



Formative Evaluation of Exhibits for the Interpretive Center at the African Burial Ground

Study 1: Reactions to the “cluster” of exhibits

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Summary of Findings

At each of the two museums, a sample of about 50 people (101 total) agreed to be interviewed about the entire “cluster” of exhibits. Their responses provide an overview of possible reactions to the exhibition as a whole.

Enthusiasm for the exhibit prototypes was mostly moderate. The Remains Wall was a clear favorite among the people interviewed, but the Historical Character (Peter Williams Sr.) and the Burial Table were also highlights for some people. To improve upon the prototypes, people indicated that they would like more history, especially more interactive history (like the Burial Table, the Core, etc.).

People were mostly able to identify some “main idea” or theme of the cluster of exhibits they viewed, but there was little depth to their understanding. Mostly they understood that the exhibits were about the African Burial Ground and African/African American history. This limited understanding is probably a product of a lack of context: visitors had no real preparation, no advance expectations as would be typical of a conscious decision to visit the African Burial Ground interpretive center. Also, this set of prototype exhibits may have suffered from a lack of an orientation or structured presentation in this “cluster” of exhibits. A finished exhibit would provide more cues for visitors to see interpretive themes more clearly.

After viewing the exhibit prototypes, people as a whole expressed moderate to high interest in visiting the interpretive center when it opens. This level of overall interest obscures some substantial differences in interest among different types of potential visitors. People of African descent expressed very high interest in visiting while people who described themselves as “white/Caucasian” expressed much lower interest in visiting. Among people who are not of African descent, New Yorkers are more interested than people from outside the city and women are more interested than men.

The interpretive center will likely have three primary points of appeal to visitors: emotional impact, scientific learning and African American history in New York.

- Many people anticipate having an emotional response to the exhibits such as thinking about racism and the horrors at slavery. Although these less pleasant reactions are shared across races and ethnicities, people of African descent are also likely to feel pride and inspiration.
- Many people (especially men) will enjoy seeing how science reveals information about the past. There is a small counter reaction in that a few people may not expect or desire the science which underlies the history they do expect.
- For many people, the exhibit prototypes presented lots of new information about African American history in New York and changed their understanding of New York’s history. What they saw surprised people not of African descent.

The striking images of human remains will not cause a problem for most visitors. Only a small proportion of people think that these images might be inappropriate for children. None of the people commented negatively on the models of hip bones that many people picked up and handled at the Museum of the City of New York. Later sections of this report go into greater detail about reactions to images of human remains.

The first report (designated with the large numeral 1 in the masthead on each page) provides the data from interviews about visitors' reactions to the whole 'cluster' of prototype exhibits as displayed at the two museums. Other reports follow, summarizing the four "individual studies" conducted about specific exhibit prototypes: 2) the Historical Character, 3) Burial Table, 4) the Core and 5) examples of Text & Graphic Styles.

A. Understanding the main idea

OVERVIEW: All of the visitors interviewed (including those in the individual exhibit studies) were asked about the main idea or theme of the entire “cluster” of exhibits. Their responses are tallied below.

Beyond recognizing that the exhibits were about the African Burial Ground, people primarily thought of the exhibits as African American history or, more specifically, African American history of New York. Others identified the theme as purposive: raising awareness and honoring African Americans.

*What’s the main idea or theme of these exhibits?*¹

<u>(n=208)</u>	
39%	African Burial Ground
13%	African American history/ contributions of African Americans
13%	history of African Americans in New York
8%	raising public awareness
8%	construction of a historic site/ creating exhibits
6%	honor and recognition of African Americans
6%	burials in New York
4%	educate people
4%	history of New York City
4%	African American culture and traditions
3%	to preserve and protect the burial ground
1%	the lives of people buried there
9%	other
3%	don’t know/ no answer

¹ This question was asked of the 101 people interviewed for the “cluster” of exhibits and the 108 people interviewed regarding four specific exhibits.

B. Overall rating of exhibits

OVERVIEW: The overall rating of exhibits was moderate to low. Even among people of African descent, the ratings were only moderate. This is reasonable due to the ad hoc feel of the organization of exhibits (the exhibit ideas were chosen to represent a range of ideas rather than to present a coherent storyline) and the preliminary development of the exhibits (only a few could be produced in the final scale and technical sophistication).

People who did give high ratings were either impressed with the photographs (probably the burial wall) or were able to anticipate what the final experience would be like. People who gave the “cluster” of exhibits moderate or low ratings (see table on the next page) mostly wanted “more;” they mentioned more history, stories, interactivity, photographs, and historical context. Some mentioned wanting things that were not present: artifacts, video, and audio.

Understanding that these exhibits are an attempt to represent designs that are not yet finished, how would you rate your experience in this room on a scale of 1 to 10?

rating the exhibits	Overall (n=101)		African descent (n=21)	white (n=59)	other/ multiple (n=20)
high	9%	**	29%	5%	0%
moderate	53%		43%	56%	60%
low	38%		29%	39%	40%

** = statistically significant difference across the columns of data (e.g., ratings of the exhibits are higher for people of African descent than for other racial/ethnic categories.)

++ = a trend that is not quite statistically significant, but may have some intuitive value

Why nine people gave it a high rating:

The burial wall really grabbed me, I pooled the existence of many ancestors

I loved everything; beautiful

Very good, I would like to see flat screen/music then becomes live place, different languages?

To know they are making an exhibit that we can take part in

New information, a new destination to look forward to going to

The photos of graves brings back memories of when they first found graves and reburied them

The photos are very nice

It's well displayed and gives background that I know

B. Overall rating of exhibits (continued)

Why other people gave it a low/moderate rating:

What would have made it a “10” for you?

(n=90)

30%	more information/ history/biographies
13%	less reading and more hands-on
12%	seeing it completed
11%	video / graphics
11%	artifacts / bones/ documents
8%	more space/ more exhibits
8%	more photographs
7%	more for kids
7%	more historical context
5%	audio
5%	more about the research / discovery
11%	other
6%	don't know/ no answer

B. Overall rating of exhibits (continued)

OVERVIEW: Although people were most impressed with the Remains Wall (which they most often called the “wall of graves”), the historical character and burial table exhibits appealed to many others. Some were most impressed just to learn the information about New York City history. Even though they were not as substantial as other exhibit prototypes, some people mentioned the map of the burial ground, the timeline and the people involved in preserving the burial ground.

What did you like the most among these exhibits?

(n=101)

33%	wall of graves
18%	historical character/ Peter Williams
17%	burial table
12%	the information provided
9%	learning about New York history
6%	map of the burial ground
5%	photos (unspecified)
4%	forensics
4%	the timeline
3%	visual impact of exhibits
2%	the people involved in preserving the burial ground
2%	interactivity
9%	other
2%	nothing/ I didn't like anything
2%	don't know/ no answer

C. Emotional reactions

OVERVIEW: The most widely shared emotional reactions to the cluster of exhibits were thoughts about the “horror of slavery” and “racism.” An equally shared reaction was non-emotional: “using science to tell about history.” A substantial number of visitors from three racial/ethnic categories expressed these three feelings.

There were some racial/ethnic differences in other reactions: people of African descent are somewhat more likely to say the exhibits “inspired me” or that they “felt pride.” People who are not of African descent were more likely to say “stunned that I did not know this.”

emotional reactions	Overall (n=101)	African descent (n=21)	white (n=59)	other/ multiple (n=20)
thought about the horror of slavery	53%	57%	53%	50%
liked using science to tell about history	53%	52%	56%	40%
thought about racism	48%	48%	49%	45%
felt solemn	42%	29%	48%	40%
stunned that I didn’t know this	33%	** 14%	34%	50%
inspired me	30%	** 62%	19%	30%
felt pride	14%	** 52%	3%	5%
wanted to be able to add to a memorial of some kind	13%	24%	7%	20%
frustrated	11%	9%	10%	15%

Ways of memorializing the people

- write a message (4)
- light a candle (4)
- bring something to leave (1)
- make a donation (1)

C. Emotional reactions (continued)

OVERVIEW: The table on this page (and some on subsequent pages) takes a look at responses according to characteristics other than race/ethnicity. To avoid the confounding the impact of race in these comparisons (the impact was illustrated on the previous page), secondary comparisons do not include people of African descent. For example, 16 of 21 African Americans in the cluster interviews were women and this would tend to bias the differences between men and women in comparisons where there are racial/ethnic differences.

The table below demonstrates that women are more likely than men to think about the horrors of slavery while men are somewhat more likely to say they “liked using science to tell about history.” About one-fifth of women (but only one man) felt frustrated by the exhibits.

emotional reaction	all people	people <u>not</u> of African descent	
	Overall (n=101)	men (n=39)	women (n=40)
thought about the horror of slavery	53%	** 41%	63%
liked using science to tell about history	53%	** 62%	42%
thought about racism	48%	46%	50%
felt solemn	42%	46%	45%
stunned that I didn’t know this	33%	33%	43%
inspired me	30%	23%	20%
felt pride	14%	5%	3%
wanted to be able to add to a memorial of some kind	13%	8%	13%
frustrated	11%	** 3%	20%

C. Emotional reactions (continued)

OVERVIEW: The visitors most likely to go to the actual interpretive center (other than people of African descent) have somewhat different emotional reactions than less likely visitors. The most likely visitors “thought about the horror of slavery” and “racism,” while less likely visitors “liked using science to tell about history.” Likely visitors were somewhat more likely (still less than half) to feel inspired by the exhibits.

emotional reaction	all people Overall (n=101)	people <u>not</u> of African descent	
		high interest in visiting (n=30)	low/mod. interest in visiting (n=47)
thought about the horror of slavery	53%	** 69%	40%
liked using science to tell about history	53%	++ 41%	60%
thought about racism	48%	** 63%	38%
felt solemn	42%	53%	40%
stunned that I didn’t know this	33%	47%	32%
inspired me	30%	** 38%	11%
felt pride	14%	3%	4%
wanted to be able to add to a memorial of some kind	13%	12%	8%
frustrated	11%	16%	9%

D. Describing the “cluster”

OVERVIEW: In describing the cluster of exhibits, most people agreed with three broad descriptions:

- Lots of new information
- African ancestors of African Americans
- It changes New York City history

Few people thought that the images were “too disturbing for a family audience.”

The racial/ethnic differences in descriptions were relatively small and none were statistically significant.

Which of these would you agree describe the exhibits in this room?

descriptions	Overall (n=101)	African descent (n=21)	white (n=59)	other/ multiple (n=20)
lots of new information	79%	91%	75%	80%
African ancestors of African Americans	79%	81%	80%	74%
it changes New York City history	70%	81%	64%	79%
awful lives of people in slavery	58%	48%	59%	68%
too much technical information, not enough of a story	36%	29%	39%	35%
images were too disturbing for a family audience ²	11%	5%	10%	21%

² Adults visiting a museum with children (53 families) were no more likely than other adults (47 visitor groups) to think the images were too disturbing for children.

D. Describing the “cluster” (continued)

OVERVIEW: Men and women described the exhibit cluster in somewhat different terms. Women were somewhat more likely than men to say “lots of new information,” “it changes New York City history” and “too much technical information, not enough of a story.”

descriptions	all people	people <u>not</u> of African descent	
	Overall (n=101)	men (n=39)	women (n=40)
lots of new information	79%	** 64%	88%
African ancestors of African Americans	79%	84%	73%
it changes New York history	70%	** 56%	80%
awful lives of people in slavery	58%	59%	64%
too much technical information, not enough of a story	36%	** 28%	48%
images were too disturbing for a family audience	11%	++ 8%	17%

E. Interest in visiting

OVERVIEW: After seeing the exhibit prototypes, interest in actually visiting the African Burial Ground is moderate to high. It is very high among people of African descent, but lower among people not of African descent, especially whites.

Among people not of African descent, women are more interested than men and New York City residents are more interested than tourists in visiting the African Burial Ground.

interest in visiting	Overall		African descent (n=21)	white (n=59)	other/ multiple (n=20)
high	50%	**	81%	36%	55%
moderate	27%		10%	37%	15%
low	23%		10%	27%	30%

interest in visiting	all people Overall	people <u>not</u> of African descent	
		men (n=39)	women (n=40)
high	50%	** 31%	50%
moderate	27%	31%	33%
low	23%	38%	17%

interest in visiting	all people Overall	people <u>not</u> of African descent	
		NYC residents (n=38)	tourists (n=41)
high	50%	** 47%	34%
moderate	27%	40%	24%
low	23%	13%	42%

E. Interest in visiting (continued)

OVERVIEW: Most people were able to identify something that they would like to see in the exhibits at the African Burial Ground. The most frequently mentioned items were more information about the lives of the people, artifacts and video/audio. People also mentioned interactives, information about individuals and the history (including modern history) of the burial ground.

Aside from what you've seen here, is there anything else you would like to see in exhibits there?

(n=101)

15%	more about lives of the people
11%	artifacts
11%	video/ audio
8%	interactives/ things for kids to do
7%	more information about individuals
7%	more history of the burial ground
7%	more about the rediscovery
4%	more visuals/ graphics
3%	more African American history
3%	more about African origins/ transportation from Africa
3%	other African American sites in New York
2%	more science/ forensics
2%	more maps of Manhattan
10%	other
24%	can't think of anything
2%	don't know/ no answer

F. Characteristics of the sample

OVERVIEW: The sample of visitors to the two museums provided a reasonable cross-section of museum visitors for analysis of different visitor types. About half of the people were residents of New York City while most others were from elsewhere in New York State or other states. Most were white, but a substantial number were of African descent or another race/ethnicity. About half were men and half were women. Their ages varied, but half were between 35 and 55 years of age. Adults with children and adults without children were equally represented.

Characteristics	sample of 101 visitors
Residence	
NY City	53
other NY	23
other US	18
other country	7
Racial identity	
African American / black	18
African or Afro-Caribbean	3
Asian	5
Hispanic/Latino	7
White	59
other/ multiple	8
Gender	
Female	55
Male	46
Age	
18-24	6
25-34	14
35-44	29
45-54	23
55-64	16
65+	13
Group Type	
Adults-only	47
Family with kids	53
Larger group	1

Formative Evaluation of Exhibits for the Interpretive Center at the African Burial Ground

Study 2: Perceptions of the Historical Character

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Summary of Findings

Along with a life-sized image of Peter Williams Sr. and a background image, the historical character exhibit presented a great deal of text on several panels. People spent varying amounts of time reading the panels, but anecdotal observation suggests that this type of exhibit attracted people.

Although people expressed mostly moderate to low interest in this exhibit, most people suggested they would like to see five or more of these characters represented. This suggests that they would like a more superficial exposure to more of the individuals rather than text-heavy depth about one individual.

People found Peter Williams Sr. interesting primarily for two reasons: his connections with churches and the fact that he purchased his own freedom. Purchasing his freedom is what people most frequently identified as the main idea of this exhibit. People connected this exhibit with the overall story of the burial ground in several ways. Some people thought his story summarized or exemplified slavery; others thought it represented the people interred in the burial ground or life in New York at that time.

Most people did not understand from the exhibit that Peter Williams Sr. was not interred in the African Burial Ground. However, very few thought that that mattered. For the most part, people understood that the names are unknown or felt that Peter Williams Sr. represented people living at that time.

In selecting other individuals to be represented in this way, people had a definite preference for the stories of women. When presented with a list of character descriptions, people made women characters their top choices. The middle choices revolved around family or a young boy. The two least favored choices were men.

A. Appeal of this component

A.1 Ratings of interest

A.2 What is most interesting about this story?

A.3 Preferences for other stories

A.4 Suggestions for improvements

A.1. Ratings of interest

OVERVIEW: Although people rated this exhibit moderate to low, most people thought they would like to find out about five or more historic characters like this one. This suggests that for most people this will probably not be a highlight, but populating the exhibits with images of real people would make the experience more interesting.

How interesting do you think the actual exhibit would be using a scale from 1 to 10?

Rating	
High (9-10)	5
Moderate (7-9)	13
Low (1-6)	9

How many individuals represented like this would you actually spend the time to find out about when the exhibit is built?

1-4	7
5	7
10 or more, all	13

A.2. What is most interesting?

OVERVIEW: People were most interested in how he was connected to the Methodist Church and how he purchased his and his family's freedom. Three people said there wasn't anything particularly interesting to them.

What did you find out about this person that was particularly interesting to you?

Connection with church

*The fact he was involved with the all black church
Yes, that he started a Methodist Zion church, I still don't see relevance
The way he was able to buy himself and family out showed a real determination, had a
recognized role in community
That he was Methodist and they didn't just give freedom; he was a sexton, he didn't seem
very Methodist but I am Jewish
That he worked in a church, was it connected to a more literate story?
Gave Christians of African descent a place of their own for worship
He was church sexton and able to buy his family freedom, become a tobacconist and
formed a church*

Purchased freedom

*He was born enslaved and bought his freedom
He bought his family out of slavery and became a businessman
Purchased his own freedom
Fact that, pro-British population enslaved him; he bought his freedom
The fact he bought his own freedom, freed his family, bought a church
His story is not that different from stories of other slaves who purchased their freedom
He took his family out of slavery
That they lived after turn of the century, wondered about how feasible it was to earn freedom
He was free and had a middle class life
He bought his whole family out of slavery, payments to the church*

Other answers

*The side he ended up on in the Revolutionary War
Never heard of him so everything was interesting,
He was a tobacco maker after freeing himself
That he existed
The fact that he came from a poor family
I get a true idea, I never heard this before
His job and how he helped others*

A.3. Preferences for other stories

OVERVIEW: People were much more interested in the stories of women than stories of men. Three of the top four choices involved women and the fourth involved a man in relation to his wife and children. The two least preferred subjects were both men and in both examples there was less of a story included in the descriptions.

Which types of people would you most like to see represented?

A young adult woman who was enslaved & brought to New York directly from West Africa; she spoke neither Dutch nor English when she arrived	12
A free African woman who sold vegetables at market in order to make a living	12
A young girl indentured to a widow as domestic & manual labor in early 1700's	8
An enslaved man who worked on the docks, whose wife & children were separated by sale to other "owners"	8
A young boy who was hired out as a chimney sweep by his "owner"	6
A man who escaped slavery in the South to fight on the British side in the American Revolution	5
A man captured from a Spanish slave ship in the 1620's, brought here by Dutch	3

Preferences for other stories (continued)

What would you like to find out about that person?

A young woman who was enslaved and brought to NY directly from W. Africa

Her background, her African heritage, her life as not English or Dutch

How they know what they know about her

To hear about the first experience of being enslaved

A little more of the culture, learn more details

Bring the woman here, how is she going to survive? very hard

Daily routine; humanize them

Did she accomplish something great without knowing English or Dutch?

How she learned English and how did she get along without it

Letting you know how someone came here and being sold

To contrast with B (free woman who sold vegetables)

Was she educated or did she lead life of prostitution? What happened to her?

What happened to her? what her life was like before and what happened in New York

A free African woman who sold vegetables

Daily routine

How she became free; how she got vegetables and who she supported?

How her life was different

How she made a living, how she got free

Representing that the lady is free

The idea of being black and free while other blacks were slaves

How she got to be free, when she lived

If she was a mother; how she took care of children if she had any

*The struggles of the time, who bought the vegetables? Only blacks? Did she do well
because she was so strong?*

What kind of a life she had and if she had a family

Whatever information is known about her lifestyle, where does she live?

Where she sold vegetables, what her home life was like

A young girl indentured to a widow

Her life of being enslaved, her relationship with widow

How it would be like for a child

How long she was indentured and what became of her life after she was indentured

Was she ever freed? What was her average day like?

What her life turned out to be

What their life was like

*Did she stay in the same house or was she sold repeatedly? Was owner kind or treat her
like crap?*

Who is the young girl?

Preferences for other stories (continued)

An enslaved man whose wife & children were sold to other owners

Allowed families to be created and brutally broke them up, treated children as property

Did he ever get to see his wife/children again? Who did he work for? Were working conditions ok or not?

Did he remarry or have a family?

Very inhumane, very bad

Were they ever brought back together? Were they able to buy themselves out of slavery like Peter Williams?

Who brought them over? Who enslaved him? Wages earned?

Daily life, clothes, where he lived

What happened to his wife and children? Did he ever see them again?

A young boy who was hired out as a chimney sweep

Mention about the owner and slave relationship

Who was his owner? Who were his parents?

Take for granted our children are taken care of, more so these days

What chimney sweep boys were subjected to

Who owner was, boy's family, did he come over with or without family? what the work was, how demanding it was or disgusting

A man who escaped slavery to fight with British in Revolution

Did he write a diary? What was going on in his mind, his emotions? Did he feel like giving up at times?

What happened after he fought for the British? Repercussions?

How he escaped and chose to fight on British side

How he was able to escape, why would he sign on British side, what it was like?

The aspect of hiring out of slaves, different slave uses

The reasons for fighting for the British

A man captured from a Spanish slave ship

How he was captured and what his journey was like

What happened to him after he got here, how he survived

How he got here, what happened when he arrived

A.4. Suggestions for improvements

OVERVIEW: Two-thirds of the people interviewed offered suggestions for improvements. Some wanted less text to read and more use of multi-media (e.g., graphics, sound, video). A few people wanted more details about this man's life. Several Hall of Science visitors said they would like to see more about the forensic science – how do you know what you know about the Africans buried there?

Do you have any suggestions about this exhibit?

Expand on it; not enough information about the person, would like a bigger image
More details for this person, more details when this happened
Too much text, have an actor tape the voice explaining in first person
Not so much text
Think it should be more appealing to all the senses rather than just visual
Maybe have the figures speak - for children to hear
More visuals (like Remains Wall), video and multimedia, other people's perspective
More of a gradual progression from 1619 / indentured slaves; what was it like living in New York City as a slave?

(Or about the other exhibits here?)

More exhibits
More about the science of it all, how they know what they know about these people
Discuss DNA, how do they from bones build a story, have replicas?
Have actual fossil replicas to examine
Photos very emotionally heavy, should have cautionary sign for parents, it shouldn't be so heavy that children can't come; are relatives still alive to give connection to photos and stories?
Make it as graphic as possible ignore sensibilities of people looking at it
Video, some demographics about the burial
Statistics on people buried there and artifacts found, information on different crafts
Anything about maps and how Africans communicated

**B. Understanding this component and its
relationship to the other exhibits**

B.1 Perceptions of the main idea

B.2 How does this fit in with the overall story?

**B.3 Reactions to having stories about people
who are not buried there**

B.4 Questions / what needs to be explained?

B.1. Perceptions of the main idea

OVERVIEW: People grasped the idea that Peter Williams Sr. had been enslaved but was able to overcome that and purchase his own freedom. Others described it simply as the story of one person of African descent or a part of African American history. A few people thought the individual was misleading or unrepresentative of African Americans at the time.

What's the main idea or theme of this specific exhibit?

African American who bought freedom, empowerment, civil rights

Surprising that he bought himself out of slavery, that African Americans were entrepreneurial and sought education

Telling how he was a slave, bought his freedom, how it was back in the day

How he freed himself as a slave

Black man being heard and rising up from where he'd been

Dealing with the original human rights here

Survival, how he came from nothing and what he did to get freedom for his family, represents freedom, he had a vision, hope for others

Black people who had been slaves gained skills and freedom and developed a community of their own

Describing people who were in New York City area and able to buy freedom and make a good living for themselves and their families

Black man at that time who rose to the occasion & succeeded in doing something about it

Theme of how someone went from slavery to non-slavery

To highlight the fact of the neglect of people and their human rights

That African Americans near the end of 18th century were not as powerless as you would think

Life of African Americans in NY during that time

Someone who lived during slavery

Peter Williams, Sr.

To depict the life of African Americans in New York at the time that the African Burial Ground was open and used

It talks about Peter Williams

A leader that existed within this community

Times changing

Tells the story of early African Americans in New York, a notable one

History of African American people in New York City

Personal story

Personalize things you will see

Personalize the experience, can't believe he had to buy his family, that the church didn't let him just go, I'm curious about the price he had to pay

B.1. Perceptions of the main idea (continued)

Didn't like the way he was depicted

*Over-exemplified African American life; didn't seem real, need more about people
without financial status then*

Very misleading, people will think he was well off

Other / Unclear

He tried to create an African burial so people could have them

*Trying to understand when burial ground was hidden from view; I do not see relevance
of Peter Williams*

B.2. How does this fit in with the overall story?

OVERVIEW: In general, people could understand how this exhibit fits into the overall story of the African Burial Ground. However, they connected it in several different ways: a story of slavery, representative of the people interred in the burial ground, life in New York at this time, and the role of churches.

Was it easy or not so easy to figure out how this exhibit would fit in with the story of the African Burial Ground?

easy	22
not so easy	5

How do you think it fits with the rest of the story?

Tells the story of slavery

He was a slave, anything that has to do with slavery is relevant
Representative of black American who was a slave so not a big disconnect, all
represents black life in America so that's fine
All under the umbrella of African American rights
He's just one example, he was a success

Represents someone who might be buried there, humanizes the story

he was buried there
Humanizes it
Representative of people buried there
It's possible that he could be one of the people buried there
Knowing the life of someone buried there
Who was buried vs. a freeman who's not in the burial ground

The time period / life in NY

It ties in to the time period
All of a community that thrived at that time
It's about a physical place where African Americans have in New York
It's all close in the same time period

Association between churches and cemeteries

Churches are associated with funerals and would like to know how Williams helped
with rituals of the funeral
Founded church and people go to church and the cemetery

B.2. How does this fit in with the overall story? (continued)

Other / General answer

In a very general way

Talking about the African burial

Fit good but if you put more details better

It's a great story

It's a way of telling the story

One of the few. Does not represent the coverage/total people

Not easy

Vague on that

*Not sure if he was buried there or if the church was connected to it, good example of
African American experience*

I think he was the caretaker of the burial ground and preserving it

B.3. Reactions to having stories about people not buried there

OVERVIEW: It was not clear to most people that Peter Williams Sr. was not buried in the African Burial Ground, but for most, it also did not matter. A few people thought that representations of people should be directly tied to the burial ground.

Did you notice if this particular person was buried in the African Burial Ground?

yes	3
no	21
not sure	3

Would it matter to you if you knew that although he lived during that time, he was not buried there?

yes	7
no	19
not sure	1

Why does it matter?

He was important in New York City and should know where he is buried

Should be tied into exhibit

The person should be buried where they worked and lived

Supposed to be there

If he worked, lived there, founded it, it would be sad if he wasn't buried there

Interesting to find out that information

Part of his life that should be included

B.3. Reactions to having stories about people not buried there (continued)

Why doesn't it matter to you?

In those days it's unpredictable where people were buried, different things going on back then

It's not determined who the people were

You don't know the history of the people buried there

There are two stories; one of African Burial Ground, other is African Americans in New York pre-civil war, some enslaved, some free

Part of the picture, what's more important is how he survived

His job and earning his freedom is interest

Doesn't really matter to me where he was buried

Because it still shows history of time

Interesting to know individual

No, but I'd like to know about other people

If he was instrumental

It doesn't matter that he was buried as long as he was involved with the burial ground

Buried at own church

B.4. Questions / what needs to be explained?

OVERVIEW: About half of the people interviewed had questions about the exhibit, but their questions were idiosyncratic rather than indicating one or two specific themes.

Is there anything you would like explained about it, that wasn't obvious, or a question you now have about this exhibit?

yes	15
no	12

What?

Who is he?

More about his family, the lineage, are his descendents still in New York City?

Actual pictures, person doesn't represent what's in text, common person

More detail about what life was like for free African Americans in New York; where they found housing? obstacles?

Would want it expanded; I don't know what

For some details

Call out specific areas of the city

How much he had to pay to free himself and family, his business, tobacco store

How feasible it was to become free

Was he not enslaved before they abandoned him?

What is that church?

Did he start the first church for blacks?

What motivated the African Americans to see this land

How it relates to other things in the exhibit

Tell a little bit about what happened with Africans who sided with British

C. Characteristics of the sample

Characteristics	sample of 27 visitors
Residence	
NY City	16
other NY	1
other US	8
other country	2
Racial identity	
African American / black	7
African or Afro-Caribbean	2
Asian	1
Hispanic/Latino	0
White	17
Gender	
Female	14
Male	12
Age	
18-24	5
25-34	2
35-44	4
45-54	8
55-64	5
65+	3
Group Type	
Adults-only	14
Family with kids	9
Larger group	4

Formative Evaluation of Exhibits for the Interpretive Center at the African Burial Ground

Study 3: Perceptions of the Burial Table

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Summary of Findings

The burial table presented a life-sized image of remains #340 in situ along with a notebook of images and text that approximate the types of interactive information that are envisioned for this exhibit when complete. The additional information illustrates some of the knowledge gained by examining the remains and the artifacts found along with the remains.

Interest:

Interest in this exhibit was moderate to high for most people who were interviewed about this particular exhibit. Since this exhibit was presented as a two-dimensional photograph with accompanying notebook of information and this type of exhibit is probably not readily familiar to most museum visitors, it is probably not surprising that interest was only moderate to high. A fully interactive exhibit would likely be a highlight to visitors.

Understanding:

In spite of the limitations of how this exhibit concept could be presented as a prototype, most people gained some impression of what this exhibit was about. People thought that the exhibit was about burial customs, demonstrated how scientists gained knowledge by examining burials, while some thought the main idea was to make the evidence more real. Connecting this information to the greater story of the African Burial Ground was a little more difficult for people; they mostly thought that this was a typical representative of the people buried there.

Emotions:

People were asked about their emotional responses to seeing this exhibit because there was a concern that a life-sized image of actual human remains might evoke adverse reactions. Only about half of people interviewed indicated that the exhibit brought out strong emotions, and only a few of these were negative feelings. Everyone thought that this would be an appropriate exhibit for the African Burial Ground interpretive center and only a few (6 of 27) thought that it might not be appropriate for children.

A. Reactions to this component

A.1 Ratings of interest

A.2 Emotional response

A.3 Perceived appropriateness of this exhibit

A.4 Suggestions for improvements

A.1. Ratings of interest

OVERVIEW: The burial table elicited moderate to high interest.

How interesting do you think the actual exhibit would be, using a scale from 1 to 10?

Rating	
High (9-10)	9
Moderate (7-9)	13
Low (1-6)	5

A.2. Emotional response

OVERVIEW: About half of the people said they felt strong emotions (a combination of anger and happiness over the delayed recognition) but the emotions were about the burial ground and not tied to the burial table. None of the people mentioned an aversion to the life-sized photographic presentation of human remains.

Does this exhibit bring out any strong emotions for you?

yes	12
no	15

(if yes) *How would you describe those emotions?*

Interesting part of New York City history

I was born in New York, a certain pride of place and historical truth is important and some of it is not pleasant

Brings out the history of New York City

Interesting, not much else really

Interesting

Surprised

Anger / a shame that it wasn't preserved, injustice

Shame that it wasn't preserved; neglect

Emotions about New York City & construction & building over history & in some cases obliterating it

I feel like crying, very moving to think about persons' lives; injustice and even today

Anger because our history has been overlooked, hope and grief also

Happy about recognition now

Anger, appreciation for fact that someone cares enough about it to preserve it and make it public

Happy our African ancestors in New York are getting recognized

Reading that they could not have proper burials, they found a way to make it sacred for them and their loved ones

Other

A deep feeling of the issue of how people feel, cultural nuance

A.3. Perceived appropriateness of this exhibit

OVERVIEW: People were unanimous that this exhibit was appropriate for the African Burial Ground. A few people thought small children may not be an appropriate audience for this exhibit.

Do you think this is an appropriate type of exhibit for the African Burial Ground interpretive center?

yes	27
no	0

Is there anyone for whom this would not be appropriate? 21 people said NO

Perhaps very young children

Very little children

Maybe little children

Maybe my four year old son but he is very sensitive

Really small children

Maybe kids wouldn't respect it

No, only people with closed minds

A.4. Suggestions for improvements

OVERVIEW: Fifteen people offered no suggestions. Others provided assorted suggestions about the interactive elements.

Do you have any suggestions about this exhibit?

More interesting when have a 3-D object or facsimile rather than just photo with light to enhance

No information about how did it appear

More interactive

Hard to tell with the way these exhibits are now, not interactive

More funding, more tactile and robust, lithographs, drawing of housing

Be colorful, interactive, clear

It should be on a website more than now

Could have more than one person

(Or about the other exhibits here?)

So fragmented; haven't seen enough; very general, no names of people like the historian

Wondering what is the history behind the African Burial Ground

Bigger map with pointer; more explanations of particular people/skeletons,

i.e. wound in head

B. Understanding this component

B.1 Perceptions of the main idea

B.2 Perceptions of the content

B.4 Questions / what needs to be explained?

B.1. Perceptions of the main idea

OVERVIEW: People had several thoughts about the main idea of this exhibit. For some, the point was to illustrate burial customs and cultures, others thought the main idea was either how scientists learned about the people interred or to give graphic evidence of the interred to visitors.

What's the main idea or theme of this specific exhibit?

Burial customs, cultural aspects, learn about their lives

How people are buried in other cultures

Show the way the people were buried in the coffin

To show how Africans lived in New York, how they were buried, how hard they worked and customs/traditions

Respect for a previous culture through understanding

To give people some information about what kind of remains were found - beads and items

Give a sense of what their lifestyle was and practices of burying their dead and their conditions

Instructive, seeing an expected gravesite, artifacts and skeletal remains, life of the person

Show different things people were buried with, customs, what the people were like

Different ornaments and condition tells about the lives they lived

Understanding of how the burial customs and the lives the people had

How people's lives can be studied by examining remains

Scientific study of people of that time, how they were buried, what type of disease, facts buried with them

The quality and life and health of the people

Trying to show how old this person was when they died

To show you what the actual remains of people was like; what archeologists can learn by his remains, the diseases and heavy stress done to his body

Case study of one of the discoveries

The people through the example of one person, age, illness, disease

Show the remains, make it more real

What it would be like to view the bones of a burial

Graphic depiction of what was found

Sort of make the exhibit personal, to actually see a body has real impact, makes it seem more real, help people to see importance

To show the bones that were discovered

Making it more real, how well preserved bodies were

Contents of coffin and layout

B.1. Perceptions of the main idea (continued)

Other / Unclear

*Means that same people lived very, very late in Africa and that ancient civilization
should be there*

Military

*Show how small the whole place was, reusable type of burial ground, crowded
in New York City*

Preserving of burial ground, size and growth patterns, what you preserve

B.2. Perceptions of the content

OVERVIEW: Two-thirds of the people interviewed were able to articulate something about the life of the person represented. Some visitors made use of the notebook (representing the interactivity) while others did not. The most common lesson obtained was that this was an individual and she had a difficult life.

What does this exhibit tell you about the life of the person represented here?

Hard life, disease, woman

*Enslaved and works very hard
Hard life burial ground
Disease, art, beads
That it was difficult
Tough, based on heavy labor and disease
Poor
Not enough, shows that there was disease and evidence of hard labor
Like CSI, look at the bones to look at the lifestyle
A woman age 34-64, hard labor life
Short, brutal, a lot of work, not having food
Clay pipe/beads, so it was a woman
Worked to survive, was an individual because she had beads*

Respect, positive perspective

*Tried to preserve bones, intelligence, caring
That it's important even if died long time ago still need proper burial place,
honor them so not die never being known, building over them is not right
He had to work very hard and lived in hardship but buried with respect by community,
obvious caring*

Burial practices

*All people buried in same area
Important that he's got a coffin
Very little, book is more interesting, personal possessions of person buried*

Nothing

*He's dead
Nothing really
Nothing
Can't tell you much of the life
Didn't go through it enough
Didn't look in the notebook*

B.3 How does this fit in with the overall story?

OVERVIEW: Everyone was able to discern how this exhibit fit in with the rest of the exhibition. For most people, it was tangible evidence of the human remains found at the burial ground.

Was it easy or not so easy to figure out how this exhibit would fit in with the story of the African Burial Ground?

easy	27
not so easy	0

How do you think it fits with the rest of the story?

Shows real example of remains from the burial ground

It's part of a burial ground

Shows a real burial from the burial ground

Remains are concrete evidence of things that may have only been inferred

Shows the actual burial

An example of the burial

Having exhibit but trying to have life size, more real like actually there

Shows visually what was found and scientific conclusions based on evidence

Saw pictures of graves and now see this is one of those graves

Showing visual example of what was discovered w/ interactivity will show more

Very graphic depiction of what was actually found; good sense of what is there

More real examples of what happened

It's important, you want to see things

It's a burial ground/ dig site

General answers

With all the pictures

This is what it's about

Good bit of information

Gives a little bit more information

That is the genesis of the story

Story about the people

Just one, curious who they are

They are part of a large culture in this city

B.4. Questions / what needs to be explained?

OVERVIEW: More than half of the people interviewed had a question about the exhibit. Primarily they wanted to know about the background of the individual or more information about the burial practices.

Is there anything you would like explained about it, that wasn't obvious, or a question you now have about this exhibit?

yes	17
no	10

What?

Background of the person, lifestyle

Don't know much about age, diet, about the person without pressing buttons

Lacks context; need context, lifestyle, challenges

The background of the person

Is it a male or female?

Is there a particular reason why this person chosen? Says notable individual

More that you make it human the better to put face to it to make it not look dead

Shining teeth metal; the age

Should vary based on age, how old is it?

More information about the burial ground, burial practices

Was this all covered with concrete?

Where did they find remains? How many years ago? Which part of Africa did they belong to?

About the burial

Was it known that the burial ground existed?

How many were there? What about clothing?

Man or woman? Were there fragments of clothing, were buried facing east, buried on top of each other?

Historic context

Historical/lifestyle context, dynamics of the city then

Living conditions, how they died, obviously mass burial, doesn't tell you what happened at that time

Other

Where are the beads?

Does it relate to one of these specific examples in the notebook?

C. Characteristics of the sample

Characteristics	sample of 27 visitors
Residence	
NY City	15
other NY	6
other US	5
other country	1
Racial identity	
African American / black	5
African or Afro-Caribbean	2
Asian	2
Hispanic/Latino	1
White	17
Gender	
Female	14
Male	13
Age	
18-24	1
25-34	4
35-44	11
45-54	4
55-64	5
65+	2
Group Type	
Adults-only	12
Family with kids	14
Larger group	1

Formative Evaluation of Exhibits for the Interpretive Center at the African Burial Ground

Study 4: Perceptions of the Core

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Summary of Findings

The 'Core' exhibit area could not be presented as a physical mock-up without building the space; therefore the prototype was represented by a sketch of the concept for a small room-sized exhibit plus two related images. Two ancillary images show a woman washing clothes and a young man holding an American flag. Some people were confused by the addition of the ancillary images and the people they represented.

Interest:

Even though the prototype used a relatively small drawing to represent a room-sized exhibit, people expressed moderate to high interest in this exhibit. At odds with this interest, most people thought they would only stop briefly and did not imagine spending substantial time here. Even those who said they would stay longer only thought they would look at the exhibit and not necessarily interact with it in any way. The final exhibit (with greater detail as well as changing sound and lighting) may induce people to spend more time than is imagined by the people interviewed for this research, particularly if they find a need for contemplative space due to the stronger affective experience of the whole setting.

Emotions:

People anticipate experiencing some impact from this exhibit. About half of the people interviewed thought that they would feel strong emotions: mostly sadness and empathy.

Meaning:

People are likely to interpret this exhibit in their own unique ways and some people may not be satisfied with the ambiguity (and lack of explicit explanation) contained in this scene. Most people see this scene as mourning the loss of a family member. Many assume the burial is of an elder, while some assume it is a child being buried. The concreteness of the figures and setting may lead some people to assume this is a typical scene for the people buried in the African Burial Ground.

A. Reactions to this component

A.1 Ratings of interest

A.2 Emotional response

A.3 Suggestions for improvements

A.1. Ratings of interest

OVERVIEW: People thought that the actual experience of the core would hold moderate to high interest for them. They anticipated stopping briefly but few thought they would stay for a longer time. For the most part, people thought they would simply observe the exhibit rather than reflect on its meaning. It may be more interesting to visitors experiencing the actual space, since the prototype was just a two-dimensional drawing that sought to represent a life-sized three-dimensional and multimedia experience.

How interesting do you think the actual exhibit would be using a scale from 1 to 10?

Rating	
High (9-10)	11
Moderate (7-9)	11
Low (1-6)	4

If this was the first thing you saw in an area of 12-15 exhibits, would you walk by to see other exhibits, stop briefly to look at it, or stay longer?

stay longer	6
stop briefly	15
walk by	4

(if stay longer) *What would you do at this exhibit?*

Walk around and read

Look at it

Look at it; but need context

Look, tell other people about it

Don't know, depends on text

Probably reflect and look back and do further research on it

Observe the figures to get information

Walk around and read what there is; sit and think

Ask questions, get additional info, what is taking place

Walk around quietly observing how they were buried and casket

Because it's my heritage, take as much knowledge from it and apply it to my everyday life

A.2. Emotional response

OVERVIEW: About half of the people thought that at this exhibit they would experience strong emotions such as sadness, somber, anger, respect, empathy, sensitivity, strength, and courage.

Do you think this area would have a strong emotional impact, a moderate impact, a mild impact, or no real emotional impact?

strong	13
moderate	8
mild	5
none	0

(if strong/moderate) *What emotions would you expect to feel here?*

Other / general

*Depends on different people, my sense of the African American history good and bad
Pain for past; strength for future; amount of courage
Sober mood, people being buried
Sadness, empathy, shame, grief
Sadness, historical connection
Connection, desire to learn more about past
Slavery hard life
Anger, sadness
Ones of reflection; mourning
Curiosity, sensitivity
Sadness, empathy
Sadness
Upsetting, past not always glorious but impressive that people remember
Sadness, some strength
Anger & sorrow, anger for people who are always being held back, sorrow about
being someone who can't or doesn't do anything about it
Empathy for people & understanding of whole exhibit, respect for what's happening
Sadness
Sorrow, pulling at my heart
Sadness, empowerment*

A.3. Suggestions for improvements

OVERVIEW: People who had suggestions regarding this exhibit mostly wanted a more extensive and lively experience including more visual experiences and more explanation to understand what they were seeing. 15 people offered no suggestions.

Do you have any suggestions about this exhibit?

More text that explained what you're looking at; don't see enough signs inside
Much stronger context, historical documents or reproductions of historical documents
Like story station and orientation map
Full boned figures not stick figures
Provide slave narratives through audio to provide life to the project and credibility
More you know the better
More maps and photographs linking from Africa
Can put some video or sculpture
Video explanation, people could leave books for people to make observations?
I'd love to see a replica of the burial

(Or about the other exhibits here?)

Map not clear, recommend map of state of NY and Manhattan
Who is submitting idea for interpretive center? Who do they represent? What is the specialty of the designers? What was life like for the enslaved at this time?
Give more "flesh" to this, more information/explanation about what these people represent, map of languages with countries labeled, actual prototype skeleton, story of trans-Atlantic slave trade, this is an opportunity to tell the true story of American history.

B. Understanding this component

B.1 Perceptions of the main idea

B.2 Perceptions of the content

B.3 How does this exhibit fit with the overall story?

B.4 Questions / what needs to be explained?

B.1. Perceptions of the main idea

OVERVIEW: People interpreted this scene in many unique ways. For the most part, they thought this would be an exhibit about the lives of the people buried there. Some identified the emotional content communicated by the figures. Some thought it was an objective representation of the burial practices of the time.

Rather than focus on the major image in this exhibit (the core) many people focused on the ancillary images of people of African descent working. In other words, the idea of contemplation (an optional inward-focused visitor experience) is not necessarily apparent to people when the rest of the context takes the form of exhibits presenting content (themes, messages, information)

What's the main idea or theme of this specific exhibit?

Learn about their lives

American history and the pride in it, artwork and education

Put into life of an enslaved person

African American life in 1700s and 1800s, connection to civil rights, African Americans as integral to American history

Black people's struggle, sad facial expressions

Slavery; woman cleaning clothes

A portrayal of life, how they felt, what they did, sadness, hardship, anger

Centerpiece which someone can sit in and observe; showing flag, freedom, power struggle

Gives a sense that there were real people who lived not too long ago, makes it real today

It's about slaves

A life, like feel of time period so you will have full experience

Weariness, poverty, enslavement

How they lived many years ago and how difficult it was

Burial customs, cultural aspects

Burial science

Remembering

Showing a coffin and how people were buried

Related to a coffin

In the past Africans couldn't bury people and it's part of New York history

An idea of the burial grounds and why it's there

World; Africa being brought into it, Africans dying as result of being brought in by the world

Transition and communicated

Other / Unclear

History

Didn't get an impression

African heritage

Wasn't readily understood until I read panel, I didn't like coffin, don't know why

Africa is portrayed

B.2. Perceptions of the content

OVERVIEW: Most people thought that the main image reflected people mourning during the burial of a loved one. Most people assumed the burial was of a family member, some assuming a child while others assumed an elder. Some people drew various conclusions about the ancillary images. Nine people couldn't say anything about the life of the person represented.

What do you think is happening here?

Mourning

Mourning

Might be people mourning over the loss of a relative or friend

Mourning someone who died

Wake of some sort, of probably Grandpa

Grieving a family member

Family member died and they looking at him before he's buried

Burial ceremony for a child

The family gathering and mourning the dead

Looking over a coffin saying goodbye, it's a funeral for an elder

Burial, mourning a teenager or child

Family looking at this burial site reflecting; movement strength, power, still surviving

*Everyone looks sad, coffin, mourning the loss of someone family or fact they're in
bondage*

*Family surrounding a closed coffin, whatever remains are not seen, wake for a
husband and father*

Funeral for a soldier or maid, historical family visiting

Looking at their dead/loved ones; doesn't look like a traditional burial

*Something happened, wouldn't know what's going on (should be open
coffin), understand burial but doesn't look like a coffin, not obvious*

Reflecting on slavery

Remembering respectful of brutal past; not sure if about slavery

*Not sure coffin has to do with middle passage could be mourning ancestor it's a
little bit Disney*

*He had to work very hard and lived in hardship but buried with respect by community,
obvious caring*

Interpretation of ancillary images (woman washing clothes, young man with flag)

*Depicting African American carrying flag; civil rights, woman depicting slavery; not
sure about third picture*

Surrounding a coffin, daily life, man going off to war, protesting, different portrayals of life

A woman, slavery in action

A coffin; she seems to be washing something; is that Martin Luther King?

Showing different types of African Americans

B.3 How does this fit in with the overall story?

OVERVIEW: People found it easy to see how this exhibit fits in with the story of the African Burial Ground. For some it demonstrated the difficulties of life for the people depicted (especially those depicted in the ancillary images). For some others this exhibit represented mourning or recognizing the lives of the people represented. A few people commented on the idea that this would be the first exhibit that visitors experience.

Was it easy or not so easy to figure out how this exhibit would fit in with the story of the African Burial Ground?

easy	27
not so easy	0

How do you think it fits with the rest of the story?

Shows difficulties during slavery

Beginnings and struggles throughout
Shows past jobs of early African Americans in America
Hard labor is with or without slavery
Showing different times in history and different events
The plight of African American people
To tell everyone in the past Africans did not have human rights

It's the beginning

Mourning would be first step in tour
It's a beginning and tells what's going on
Everything around it supports what you see here
Well, I'm not sure if I would make it the first exhibit

Mourning/recognition of people

Shows family grieving maybe a sign of power, strength of loved ones
African burial ground and these appear to be African Americans burying some one, it's just different clippings of different things
It gives a certain amount of meaning and importance to those people who died
Life/death of slaves, then burial ground, mourning by family, purpose of African Burial Ground

General answers

Because of what they found and no one knew anything about it
I didn't know about African Burial Ground until I saw it in a magazine, shows what went through not far from slavery

B.4. Questions / what needs to be explained?

OVERVIEW: Over half of the people had questions about this exhibit. The lack of readily apparent context left people wondering about the significance of the people in the ancillary images and others wondering about the burial scene.

Is there anything you would like explained about it, that wasn't obvious, or a question you now have about this exhibit?

yes	17
no	10

What?

Who are the people in the related images?

*What is the relevance of picture of woman?
Who the people are in the pictures on side? The meaning of them.
Want to know history of man and lady
The man is sort of very angry carrying flag of country not accepting him, woman no opportunity
People wearing old style clothing in a modern setting
What happening with man holding the flag?*

Need more explanation/context

*What happening in the scene?
Need more explanation, looks like day in the life of a person
Everything, no context, need context why is it important
Not like other exhibits, see the three pictures and little verbiage, no idea what you're talking about had more descriptions
What is going on? Need an explanation
A little video explanation*

Would like information about the burial

*Give some understanding of the culture of people, what are ceremonies of these Africans?
Process/ritual would like to know what it's about, what they're looking at
Bright colors in the photo are thought provoking, are they related to colors associated with African Americans today wouldn't know where to begin, Seeing burial ceremony means there are several steps in history
Who died, why did they die, how reflective of the times*

C. Characteristics of the sample

Characteristics	sample size of 27 visitors
Residence	
NY City	16
other NY	5
other US	4
other country	2
Racial identity	
African American / black	4
African or Afro-Caribbean	3
Asian	2
Hispanic/Latino	4
White	12
Gender	
Female	11
Male	16
Age	
18-24	1
25-34	7
35-44	7
45-54	3
55-64	5
65+	4
Group Type	
Adults-only	11
Family with kids	16
Larger group	0

Formative Evaluation of Exhibits for the Interpretive Center at the African Burial Ground

Study 5: Perceptions of Text Samples

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Summary of Findings

This exhibit was categorically different from the other exhibits about which we asked visitors. This exhibit was explicitly about style of presenting text, graphics and illustrations and not about the specific content. Visitors were asked to compare examples of various styles, express a preference and explain the reasons for their preferences. In general, this kind of study does not produce findings whereby visitors are decisive within a range of reasonable alternatives; rather, the point is to get some feedback and use it to shape the final formats, which might be different from the choices that were tested.

Voice:

There was not a strong consensus for specific writing styles for textual presentations. People were evenly divided in preferring first-person or third-person writing perspectives. However, most people thought that the first-person writing style (from the perspective of a person of African descent) was “more welcoming” while about one-third thought it was “less welcoming.” People who preferred the first-person thought it was “inclusive” while people who disliked it thought it was “exclusive.”

Reading level:

People were also evenly divided in preferences for 8th-grade or 4th-grade reading levels. The 8th-grade reading level was viewed as better written and more detailed, while the 4th-grade reading level was perceived as easier to read and more objective.

Colors:

People were shown a choice between two graphic styles and color palettes; one was a black background with a serrated left border of another color and the other had soft shades of blue or brown backgrounds with a complementary color of text. Most people preferred the black background: some because it was stylistically striking while others thought it appropriately symbolized death. People who preferred the blue and brown background thought they looked more subdued and made the text easier to read.

Illustrations:

Visitors had strong preferences for two of the four illustration (drawing) styles shown to them. One style was preferred because people perceived the patterns as representing African/African American traditional textiles and the feel was appropriately somber. Another style was preferred because it was perceived as spiritual and idealized. The least preferred styles were described as too “cute” or too “modern.”

A. Preference for 1st person vs. 3rd person style

OVERVIEW: People were equally supportive of having a first-person or third-person writing perspective. People who preferred the first-person style thought it was “inclusive.” People who preferred the third-person style (see comments on next page) thought that it conveyed the information more clearly.

<p><u>A. First-person</u></p> <p>Africans in New York: <i>It began with diversity</i></p> <p>Slave traders brought our African ancestors here from West and Central Africa, and from the Caribbean. They had different customs. They spoke different languages. A common language unites us now. But the people buried here spoke Akan, Portuguese, Dutch, Ibo and many other tongues. They were as different from each other as we African descendents are today.</p>	<p><u>B. Third Person</u></p> <p>Africans in New York were always diverse</p> <p>Slave traders brought Africans here from West Africa and Central Africa. They brought even more Africans from the Caribbean. The people buried here spoke Akan, Portuguese, Dutch, Ibo and many other tongues. Enslaved Africans came to New York with different customs, but once here, they blended their beliefs into common traditions.</p>
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Which description would you prefer to read?

A) 1 st person	13
B) 3 rd person	14

Why A (1st-person)?

Speaks more to us; second person language, someone who sees no relationship between races might not see that but I do

National incentive and somewhat inclusive "we" sounds like it is presented by African Americans to rest of community

More personalized

I like that it began with diversity

"Common language" I like that sentence

More personal; common language, brings you closer

Just the way it's written, more active, first person

B sounds like it's talking down to you, A is more removed

The language is inclusive

Shows the diversity of background not unity

Because I read it first and they're the same

Ends with common language uniting us

Bring it out that we are all part of the same family, other has specific languages

A. Preference for 1st person vs. 3rd person style (continued)

Why B (3rd-person)?

Easier for me to read it

More information, has the city of New York, singles out enslavement which very important

Think A is too obvious

Made more sense; felt more blended

Seems more complex; more specific

Clearer

Like the part about beliefs and traditions

A makes it sound that Africans began in New York

Worded more clearly

Hammers home the point about the fact that the African cultures were diverse

Talks about the languages.

Straight style of headline

Headline honors those discovered and a broader picture of the city

Want it to have more truth and it sounds more formal

A. Preference for 1st person vs. 3rd person style (continued)

OVERVIEW: Most people thought the first-person style was more welcoming, but about one-third thought it was less welcoming. Even among most people not of African descent, most thought the first-person language was more welcoming, but some felt excluded.

One label mentions “our African ancestors” and “we African descendants.” Does this style make it seem more welcoming or less welcoming for people who are not of African descent?

more welcoming	18
less welcoming	6

Why is it more welcoming?

Speaks to whole human family of racial differences so slant no differences at all
Use of pronoun “our” vs. use of third person
I did not have a problem with it
Makes it seem like it’s all part of us; bringing everyone together, sentence about common language, history brings everyone together
Because we’re all brothers, we’re affected by it
Everybody has African descendents; no in-between, nice to presume person looking at it is interested and include them as a member
More inclusive but not showing favor
More of a collective sharing of the history
The other is less personal
Speaks of its true origins
Empathy
Is about their own heritage
Because I’m part of it
“Our” brings black people into the room
People who get offended get offended at everything
Doesn’t feel less welcoming
They speak in past tense and it draws people to learn more about the background

Why is it less welcoming?

It strikes me as exclusionary
Because it’s as if to say if you’re not one of us you’re someone else
I am not African
Limited to people talking to just “our”
They saw Africans as an outside entity
Mentions we and I’m not part of that
Origins of certain people, it’s history

B. Preference for grade level of text

OVERVIEW: People were evenly divided in their preference for the reading level of the text (they did not know that the difference between the panels was related to reading level). People who preferred the 8th-grade reading level thought it was written better and provided more detail. People who preferred the 4th-grade reading level (see comments on next page) thought it was easier to read and more objective.

<p><u>8th grade reading level</u></p> <p>Archaeologists start with a grid to map out the site</p> <p>When the archaeologists found a burial, they marked its place on their grid map, called a site plan. They drew pictures of each skeleton, carefully recording the position the bones were in when they found them.</p> <p>Studying the drawings helped them figure out the kind of work the enslaved Africans were forced to do, and how old they were when they died.</p>	<p><u>4th grade reading level</u></p> <p>Archaeologists dig, draw and take photos</p> <p>Archaeologists took photos, and made drawings. When they found a burial, they marked its exact place on a grid map.</p> <p>They drew every bone, pin and piece of cloth just the way they found it. By studying the bones, they learned how old the Africans were when they died.</p>
--	---

Which writing style would you prefer to read?

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| A) 8 th grade level | 13 |
| B) 4 th grade level | 13 |

Why A (8th-grade reading level)?

More realistic, talking Africans were not enslaved when they were here

Seems more honest

More well written, version 'B' is more for kids

Clear and well written

More detail

Both excellent, like way the sentence is complete and detailed

Talks about what kind of work forced to do; seems to give more information

Easier to read

Little bit more info to it

Stands out more; thicker letters

Gives a little more info, both leave more questions than answers

B. Preference for grade level of text (continued)

Why B (4th-grade reading level)?

More to the point; concise

Version 'A' is deader

More scientific and objective

Simpler to follow

Easier to read; shorter; straight to the point, big paragraphs people tend to ignore

Photographs vs. the drawings

B is simpler

From what I know, scientists do it the way it's described in panel

'A' uses a lot more words to say the same thing

Easier to understand especially for younger people

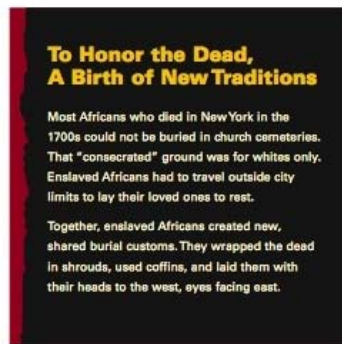
More succinct, gets to point; people don't know what grid map site plans are

Shorter

C. Preference for graphics

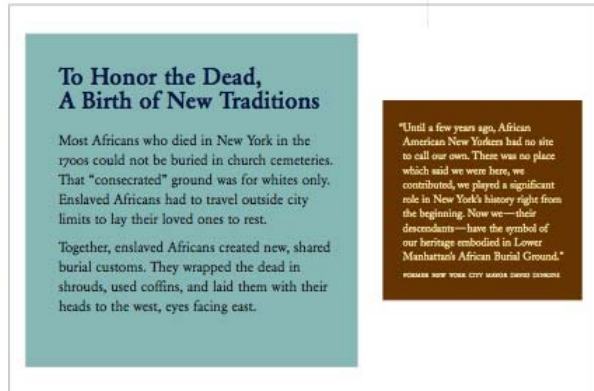
OVERVIEW: Most people preferred the graphic style with the black background with serrated color left border. Many thought the graphic style was more striking and some others associated the black background with death. People who preferred the blue and brown colors (see comments on next page) thought those panels were lighter/subdued and “easier to read.”

A.



"Until a few years ago, African American New Yorkers had no site to call our own. There was no place which said we were here, we contributed, we played a significant role in New York's history right from the beginning. Now we—our descendants—have the symbol of our heritage embodied in Lower Manhattan's African Burial Ground."
Former New York City Mayor David Dinkins

B.



"Until a few years ago, African American New Yorkers had no site to call our own. There was no place which said we were here, we contributed, we played a significant role in New York's history right from the beginning. Now we—our descendants—have the symbol of our heritage embodied in Lower Manhattan's African Burial Ground."
FORMER NEW YORK CITY MAYOR DAVID DINKINS

Which background graphics would you prefer to see for the exhibit labels?

- | | |
|-------------------------|----|
| A. Black w/ left border | 19 |
| B. Blue & brown colors | 8 |

Why that one? (black w/ left border)

More colorful, fits in with fabric; more African looking
I see horror and death which black is symbol of
More engaging, other color looks typical like other museums, black is more attractive
Strong message and bold contrast conveys spirit of message better
Jumps out more; fonts better; cleaner font
Stands out, jumps out at you
Other looks more like Hall of Science neutral, black more associated w/ death
I like colors, the other one is too sterile-basic; black more inviting
The way the colors draw me in, black background pulls me in more
More drastic, the dead fits
More contrast, interesting
More striking
Draws my attention immediately
More forceful colors
Brings out the writing
Easier to read
More ethnic
More dramatic and stark and intense
Graphics draw my eyes to it, easier to read, other is boring

C. Preference for graphics (continued)

Why that one? (blue & brown colors)

Because it looks subdued, modern

Brightness seems to pull you in more

Seems easier to read

Like color and contrast better

It's softer, easier to read

Simpler, plain and attractive, better typeface, other is too modern

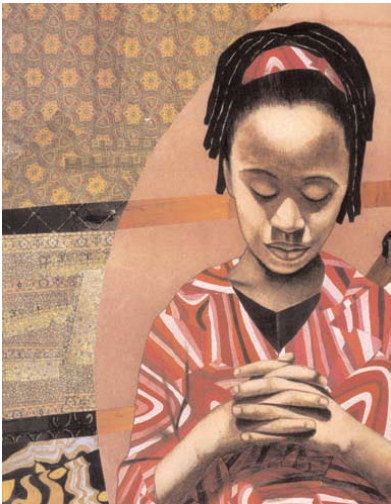
Lighter

More appealing, doesn't look dated

D. Preference for drawing styles

OVERVIEW: Most people preferred drawing styles A & B over C & D (see following pages). Some people preferred “A” because of the “traditional” cultural patterns used while others responded to the “somber” content (even though visitors were asked to ignore the specific content). People who preferred “B” thought that it was more spiritual and “idealized.” Some people thought “C” was too “cute” and others thought “D” was too modern.

A



B



C



D



D. Preference for drawing styles (continued)

Which drawing style do you think would be most appropriate for the African Burial Ground?

A	12
B	11
C	2
D	2

Why A?

Strikes me as combination of solemn and respectful; colors and patterns evoke connection to cultural origin of people buried here

Calm; reflective

Seems the most natural

More like traditional, related to African art in the subconscious

I like colors and style; reminds me of several books I've read; influenced by pictures, the content when choosing answers

Textiles little bit more about patterns

The style looks old fashioned, reminds of past

'A' and 'B' are somber, I can't call it style, spiritual tone, no emotional reaction to 'D'

Its more ethnic with patterns and the hair

More meditative, reflects people buried here

Somber

Why B?

Good commemoration, spiritual

More traditional and ritualistic

Has more style to it; has a certain something to it

More spiritual looking, more earthy

I like the idealized style

Wings feel like angels, honors them more, the style

More elongated shape to limbs and body; 'A' is too cluttery; 'D' is too modern,

C' looks like what you find in a first grade reader

Gives it a sort of abstract, without putting definite faces on figures

Probably because of image, maybe light, texture

Attractive has character to it

Why C?

More soothing and draws you in because it's fuzzier you want to focus more

More family oriented with softer colors

Why D?

Others more stylized

More realistic

D. Preference for drawing styles (continued)

Is there one that you think would be wrong for a place like the African Burial Ground?

A	0
B	0
C	6
D	7
no, all ok	14

Why C?

No relationship in people's mind

Seems like white 1950's America

Although it's black people it looks very white to me

It is cutsie

Looks like a cartoon

Looks like what you'd find in a first grade reader

Why D?

Too colorful ink; too modern

It's not ethnic enough

Real modern

More realistic, less artistic

Is too cold and modernistic

Too much like a photograph

E. Characteristics of the sample

Characteristics	sample size of 27 visitors
Residence	
NY City	13
other NY	4
other US	9
other country	1
Racial identity	
African American / black	3
African or Afro-Caribbean	2
Asian	1
Hispanic/Latino	1
White	20
Gender	
Female	18
Male	9
Age	
18-24	1
25-34	2
35-44	4
45-54	12
55-64	4
65+	3
Group Type	
Adults-only	10
Family with kids	16
Larger group	1

Orientation Map

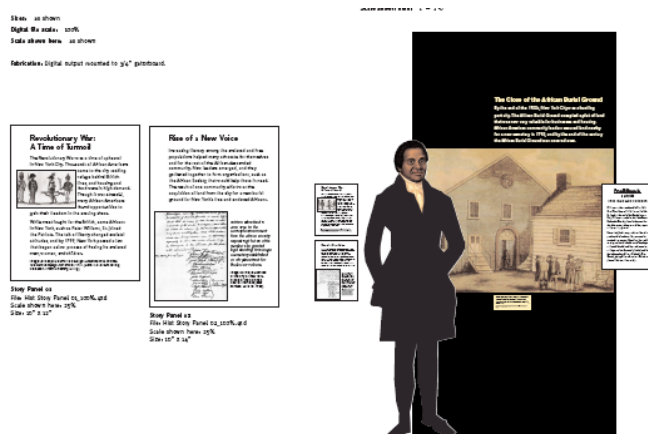
This map that shows the differences between the memorial site boundaries and the boundaries of the historical burial ground in its entirety.

Rediscovery Timeline

<p>1989</p> <p>Barry Goldwater's daughter is elected to Congress, the first woman to represent a Republican in the House of Representatives.</p> <p>1991</p> <p>Barack and Michelle Obama are elected to Congress, the first African American couple to represent the United States in the House of Representatives.</p>	<p>The University of Wisconsin becomes the first state to recognize same-sex couples as legal partners for purposes of inheritance and health care decisions.</p> <p>1992</p> <p>Barack and Michelle Obama are elected to Congress, the first African American couple to represent the United States in the House of Representatives.</p> <p>1993</p> <p>The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is founded, the first national organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans.</p>	<p>Barack and Michelle Obama are elected to Congress, the first African American couple to represent the United States in the House of Representatives.</p> <p>1994</p> <p>The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is founded, the first national organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans.</p> <p>1995</p> <p>Barack and Michelle Obama are elected to Congress, the first African American couple to represent the United States in the House of Representatives.</p>	<p>The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is founded, the first national organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans.</p> <p>1996</p> <p>Barack and Michelle Obama are elected to Congress, the first African American couple to represent the United States in the House of Representatives.</p> <p>1997</p> <p>The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is founded, the first national organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans.</p>	<p>The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is founded, the first national organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans.</p> <p>1998</p> <p>Barack and Michelle Obama are elected to Congress, the first African American couple to represent the United States in the House of Representatives.</p> <p>1999</p> <p>The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is founded, the first national organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans.</p>	<p>The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is founded, the first national organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans.</p> <p>2000</p> <p>Barack and Michelle Obama are elected to Congress, the first African American couple to represent the United States in the House of Representatives.</p> <p>2001</p> <p>The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is founded, the first national organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans.</p>	<p>The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is founded, the first national organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans.</p> <p>2002</p> <p>Barack and Michelle Obama are elected to Congress, the first African American couple to represent the United States in the House of Representatives.</p> <p>2003</p> <p>The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is founded, the first national organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans.</p>	<p>The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is founded, the first national organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans.</p> <p>2004</p> <p>Barack and Michelle Obama are elected to Congress, the first African American couple to represent the United States in the House of Representatives.</p> <p>2005</p> <p>The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is founded, the first national organization dedicated to protecting the rights of all Americans.</p>
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This timeline includes a selection of events from the modern history of the African Burial Ground. While not comprehensive, it includes actions by the federal and city government, the African descendent community, researchers on the African Burial Ground Project, and the international community.

Historical Character (individual exhibit study)



A life-sized individual is represented on a free-standing foam-core graphic along with background and explanatory text panels. The individual represented is Peter Williams Sr., an enslaved man who gained his freedom and a contemporary of some of the people interred in the African Burial Ground. The text describes his life and New York City during that era.

The Remains Wall



Photographs of the 419 skeletal remains, shown in situ, will be displayed on a grid totaling approximately 60 square feet. Each image has a small caption identifying the age and sex of the person depicted.

Burial Table (individual exhibit study)



A photo of a burial in situ is reproduced at life size and displayed on a table-height surface, as would be an image on the Burial Table interactive. A notebook of text and images represents an interactive feature to be investigated in the finished exhibit. The notebook includes different types of skeletal images: drawings of artifacts found in situ and close-up photos of bones.

Bone Examination (set of prototypes displayed at the Museum of the City of New York)



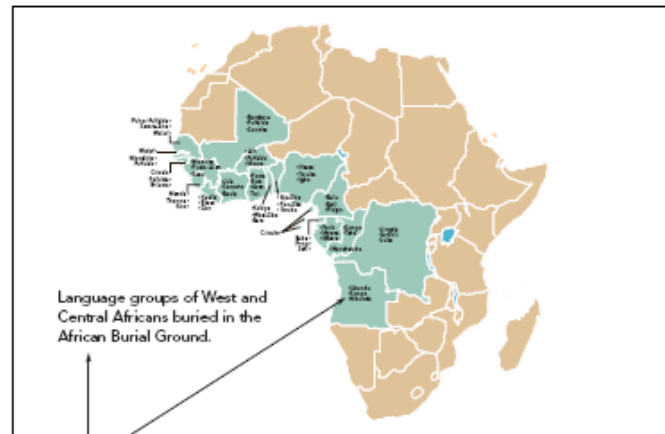
Comparing these two pelvis bones, the differences in the shape and the main opening are clear. These tell researchers which one is male and which female – a female has a broader shape and larger opening.

Story Station



This foam-core panel represents brief descriptions of individuals involved in the rediscovery of the African Burial Ground. Throughout the African Burial Ground Interpretive Center, visitors will have the opportunity to hear the words of a variety of people connected with the burial ground – researchers and historians, activists and community members, leaders and politicians, and other New Yorkers. Shown here are several perspectives which may be included.

African Diversity



A map of Africa identifies the variety of languages used in central and western Africa.

**The Core
(individual exhibit study)**



A foam-core panel illustrates the concept of the “core.” Upon entering the African Burial Ground Interpretive Center, visitors will immediately see the scene shown in the large image. The figures will be three-dimensional, similar to the examples shown, though full color rather than gray tones. The pine coffin at the center will be constructed of wood. Ambient audio may include soft voices, singing, drumming, and natural noises like insects. The lighting will slowly dim and lighten, changing the appearance of the scene over a quarter hour. Illustrations representing a likely landscape appear on the surrounding walls.

**Graphic & Text approaches
(individual exhibit study)**



The use of graphics and the perspective in the text combine to generate an atmosphere and create a feel in the exhibit space. The story of the African Burial Ground consists of many interwoven threads and therefore offers many options for presenting graphics and text. Here we show a few examples of those options.